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AUTHOR Greer, William C.
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ABSTRACT

This speech begins with praise for the Subcommittee's past action in furthering the education of the handicapped and encouraging federal assistance for these children. The growing need for additional aid for preschool education to meet the developmental needs of handicapped children is emphasized. Also discussed are the sparseness of government programs in the above area, the expertise and leadership of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (BEH), and the pressing needs of children living in handicapping environmental conditions. It is recommended that (1) programs be established for the identification and aid of handicapped children, (2) such programs be administered by the BEH, (3) projects be awarded to any agency that demonstrates its capability to serve handicapped children, (4) such projects demonstrate coordination with existing child development and handicapped children services, (5) typical projects should offer several services (including diagnosis, preparation of educational prescriptions, and a communication network), (6) these objectives be met by expansion of the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act or by specific inclusion in other bills, and (7) cost be defrayed by federal and state funds. (MH)

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STATEMENT OF

WILLIAM C. GEER

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

TO THE SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

REGARDING HR 13520

THE COMPREHENSIVE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

AND CHILD DAY CARE ACT OF 1969,

AND OTHER RELATED BILLS

FEBRUARY 26, 1970

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ADDITIONAL WITNESSES

FREEMAN MCCONNELL, DIRECTOR
THE BILL WILKERSON HEARING & SPEECH CENTER
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

FREDERICK J. WEINTRAUB
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am William C. Geer, Executive Secretary of The Council for Exceptional Children, and with me today is Dr. Freeman McConnell, Director of the Bill Wilkerson Hearing and Speech Center in Nashville, Tennessee, and Chairman of The Council for Exceptional Children's Early Childhood Education Committee. Also accompanying me is Mr. Frederick J. Weintraub, Assistant Executive Secretary of The Council for Exceptional Children.

The Council for Exceptional Children, on behalf of its 38,000 members involved in the education of handicapped and gifted children, is pleased to once again appear before this Subcommittee which has done so much for handicapped children, to express our endorsement of increased federal assistance to stimulate and support comprehensive day care, health, and educational services for preschool age children.

There is little need to reiterate our concern for the majority of the handicapped children of this nation who are not receiving the educational services they require to become productive citizens to this Subcommittee that has fathered the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act and the act creating the National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped; nor is this the time to belabor the tragedy of the American gifted child when the House has recently passed the Gifted and

Talented Children Educational Assistance Act. The authorities that have testified during this hearing have corroborated in an articulate and scholarly manner the need for the early education of children. The concept that learning begins at age six is dead, and perhaps, never really existed. The experiences of Head Start, while certainly having weaknesses, raised our horizons as to what could be achieved. Efforts such as "Sesame Street" add new dimensions to the possibilities to attain greater impact. The bills before this Subcommittee reflect the times and the job that must be done.

We are concerned, however, that as the mobilization takes place to serve preschool age children by all levels of government the exceptional child's unique needs will again not be met. The importance of early educational intervention in the life of the handicapped was comprehensively documented before this Subcommittee during the hearings on the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act and again recently by Dr. Edwin Martin, Acting Associate Commissioner, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. In 1968, the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children reported the following:

> The Committee is aware that research on the education of preschool children has demonstrated that early education can accelerate social and mental development of handicapped children. On the other hand, lack of educational attention to preschool handicapped children tends to increase the negative effect of mental and physical disabilities as the child becomes older.
>
> Specialized programs for preschool children have long been advocated for the deaf and the blind, but provisions for other handicapped children at the preschool level are conspicuous by their absence. Some States do not even have kindergartens for nonhandicapped children. Some States that operate kindergartens refuse admissions to children who are physically or mentally handicapped.

Even if all other social and moral arguments were disregarded, there are important economic factors to be considered. In a very real sense the handicapped child can be either another economic burden on society or can be a highly productive economic unit, if he receives proper training and education.

For example, when a handicapped child is sent to an institution for the mentally retarded and stays there over the period of his lifetime, it costs society a minimum of $75,000.

If a child can be rehabilitated through special education at an early age, the community saves many thousands of dollars. For example, if it costs about $1,000 a year for this child's education between the ages of 6 and 16 -- the total cost would only come to $10,000. With this background of education the child growing into an adult can obtain a job and become a substantive member of our society. Not only is he a producer of goods or services, but instead of spending Federal, State, or local funds for his upkeep, he contributes to the economy and carries his fair share of taxes to support the society that helped him.

In view of the impressive gains that are now possible through early intervention in the life of the handicapped child, regression of children with physical and mental handicaps can be avoided by their development at the crucial preschool age when education is most effective.

In 1965 the National Advisory Committee on the Education of the Deaf, under the chairmanship of Dr. Homer D. Babbidge, Jr., President of the University of Connecticut, reported that over half of the deaf children in the United States under the age of six and their parents were not receiving educational services. At the same time Dr. Babbidge noted that:

> In most European countries, the organized public program for the education of the deaf offers direct service to parents through the counseling service of home teachers, peripatetic teachers, or home counselors. They make contacts with parents of babies as young as nine months when hearing problems are suspected and continue counseling services to the parents on a regular basis when hearing disorders are discovered.

At the Fifth Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in 1967 in Warsaw Poland, Grace Margaret Harris, Supervisor of Preschool Services for the Deaf, Society for Crippled Children and Adults in Winnepeg, Canada stated:

> Today the guidance of hearing-impaired children begins, on a much broader scale than ever before, in infancy and the early preschool years, For children with sensory-neural or "nerve" deafness, the only avenue to integration into the hearing world so far is through skilled guidance in the home and in the more structured environments of the preschool clinic and nursery school.

In 1967, the United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. noted:

> School entrance is not the beginning of a child's learning experience, nor is "readiness" only a formal training program to be initiated around the time of school entrance. Development must be considered as a continuous process throughout life. From the cradle on, children will be "ready" for experiences on an individual basis. The child with cerebral palsy is essentially like other children. However, the limitations imposed on him by his disabilities may deprive, or at least impoverish the learning experience inherent in the environmental explorations of children without such disabilities. For some children, such deprivations may result in a permanent barrier to learning which then becomes a secondary disability.

At the 1966 meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, Lawrence E. Blaha of California State College at Los Angeles pointed out that:

> Current practice in education implies that both sighted persons and blind persons have common basic needs and developmental tasks to be satisfied. The difference between the blind and the sighted, however, lies in the manner in which each relates to and gains information about his surroundings and thereby orients himself.

> The more meaningful the basic orientation to the environment, in terms of training, variety and quality of experience, the better will be the total development of the individual and his command of his environment.

This past September, The International Seminar on Special Education held in Cork, Ireland, was devoted to early childhood education for the handicapped.

Last December, The Council for Exceptional Children sponsored a meeting in New Orleans attended by over 1500 persons on the same subject. Approximately 180 professional persons participated in panel discussions about early childhood education for the handicapped.

The Council for Exceptional Children Information Center recently compiled a bibliography of 108 publications on research on education and the preschool age child. (A copy is provided for the record.)

The Council for Exceptional Children State-Federal Information Clearinghouse for Exceptional Children has compiled the laws of the fifty states extending preschool services to handicapped children. (A copy of a summary is provided for the record.)

We bring these reports to your attention because we believe that there is sufficient evidence to justify the following points.

1. There exists a body of research and other professional literature to support the importance of early childhood educational services to the handicapped child, his family, and his community.

2. All levels of government have taken some steps to develop programs in this area, however, such programs are sparse and often overlook many children in dire need.

3. The Congress, in creating the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, realized the need for a single agency to be responsible for administering and coordinating efforts on behalf of handicapped children. It was for this reason that

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BEH was delegated to administer the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act. We believe that there exists within this agency sufficient expertise to justify its continued leadership role in seeking better services for handicapped children.

4. Children with varying handicapping conditions exist in all sectors of our society, however, inadequate prenatal and postnatal health services, nutritional deficits, safety hazards, lack of sensory stimulation, and other byproducts of our urban centers and rural communities have created disproportionate incidences of handicapping conditions. Many of those conditions can be ameliorated, and in some cases prevented. Head Start and existing day care programs have intervened in many cases with medical and social services; however, the failure to intercede with educational programs often dooms these children to failure. As Senator Winston Prouty noted, "We ask for these children not a 'head start' but a 'first chance'." To date existing Head Start and day care programs have either excluded handicapped children or, if the children are not destructive to the program, contained them. The burden then falls on the school to offer services which in many cases are too little, too late.

Recommendations

The Council for Exceptional Children supports the efforts of this Subcommittee to extend child development services to the children of this nation. In order that handicapped children might also profit from your efforts we propose the following:

1. Programs be established to enable communities to identify and serve children who present handicaps of a mental, physical, emotional, or learning nature that would indicate a "high risk" in their ability to succeed in regular education programs.

2. Programs should be administered by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in coordination and as a service to the Office of Child Development.

3. Projects may be awarded to any public or private and state or local agency which can demonstrate its expertise and capability to serve handicapped children.

4. Projects must demonstrate coordination with and service to existing child development and handicapped children services.

5. While projects would vary, a typical project should offer the following services:

   a. diagnostic and evaluative services to identify "high risk" children. These might be conducted by itinerant teams covering several day care centers. Members of the team would observe children, meet with staff and parents, and conduct evaluations to assess the educational nature of the child's disability.

   b. preparation of educational prescriptions to meet the child's educational needs. Members of the team would meet with center personnel and parents to work out strategies for providing the services the child needs.

   c. guarantee through provisions or coordination that necessary educational services are available. Many children will be able to remain in the regular program if supportive services are provided. For example, a child with a speech problem might receive three or four hours of speech therapy a week provided at the center, in the local school, or at a local speech and hearing center. Children with more serious handicaps might be referred to existing full time programs, or when not available such programs would be established.

   d. communication network that would assist local schools for preparing in advance for the child's eventual entry into their program.

   e. Serve in an "ombudsman capacity" to guarantee that the child receives the services he needs.

6. These objectives could be met by an expansion of the authority and appropriations of the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act or by specific inclusion in the bills before this Subcommittee. We do not see this proposal as a substitute for the Handicapped Children's Early Education Act but rather as an extension. This act was designed as a model program; its products should provide the models for the services we propose today.

7. It is difficult to predict cost at this time. However, we believe that the federal dollars invested will be supplemented with state funds and that the end economic return to the community will well justify the investment.

The Council for Exceptional Children is pleased to have had this opportunity to present our views on this most important matter of early education for handicapped children.